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# the DREAM 40 YEARS LATER

**Bob Filner**

*U.S. Congressman, Chula Vista*



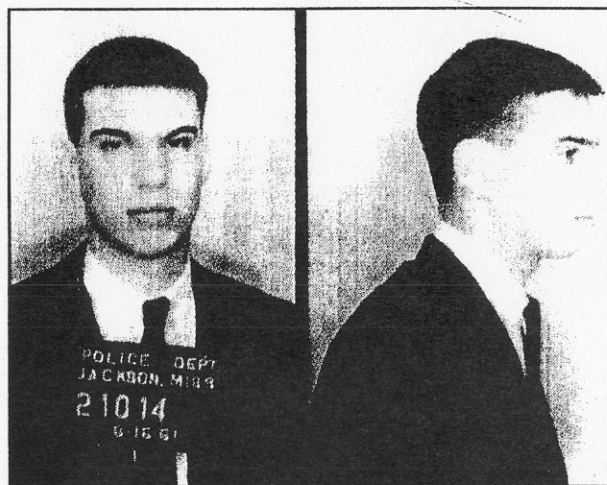
San Diego County residents Marie Swan, Lei-Chala Wilson, Larry Malone and Bob Filner recount memories of the March on Washington

**T**he America which gave rise to Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s March on Washington seems much more innocent than our country today. Division over the Vietnam War had not yet appeared. Political assassinations took place only in other countries. The youthful enthusiasm of President John F. Kennedy energized the nation. Young African-Americans — building on the success of Dr. King's 1956 Montgomery Bus Boycott — staged sit-ins and freedom rides to challenge the Jim Crow laws of racial segregation.

"Ask not what your country can do for you..."

The Civil Rights gains of the sixties resulted from direct action — protest marches, sit-ins, bravery and personal risk. Americans from every walk of life, from every race and every creed, took part in these actions which changed history. The March on Washington was seen then as just one more example of how direct action produced change. Throughout the South, at lunch counters, in front of courthouses, on

**Filner** is in his sixth term in the U.S. House of Representatives. He participated in virtually every Civil Rights action from 1957 to 1965 — and served two months in the Mississippi State Penitentiary as a result of his participation in the 1961 Freedom Rides.



trains and on busses, many Americans came together and directly confronted racism, discrimination and injustice.

Today, legal segregation no longer exists — but other threats have emerged. Nationwide, the so-called Patriot Act and the proposed Patriot Act II threaten basic civil liberties and civil rights. Our

government now has the ability to spy on anyone it merely suspects of having terrorist ties — with wiretaps, searches of library records, and other surveillance. The FBI can now seize the records of any entity, including libraries and bookstores. These new powers are fraught with the potential for discrimination and abuse. In fact, the FBI has a history of abusing its power: monitoring and infiltrating civil rights organizations — including bugs on and threatening calls to Dr. King himself.

Massive corporate media mergers threaten to limit the information that most Americans read, hear and see every day.

In California, Proposition 54 threatens to eliminate the collection of valu-

able racial data. And at our southern border, racial profiling and harassment are an every day occurrence.

Today, we have no shortage of challenges. But, unlike the sixties, the population — especially young people — seems disinterested and disengaged.

Many of the gains that have been made since 1963 are being rolled back — not only civil rights, but labor rights, environmental protections, educational opportunity, and access to health care.

Forty years later, we may have an even longer way to go than even Dr. King contemplated.